

# VISUAL MERCHANDISING

BY JILLIAN FRASER



In today's competitive market, owners of medspas and aesthetic practices must consider all aspects of retailing and maximize every opportunity to keep clients happy and returning for services. Retailing appropriate homecare products is an essential part of most aesthetic treatments. It encompasses two major components: visual merchandising and the sales process. In this article we will focus on merchandising.



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More than just the arrangement of products, effective merchandising is a creative art dedicated to presenting products in an aesthetically pleasing way—one that will encourage clients to make purchases. The art takes practice, a creative eye and an understanding of your clientele. There is no right or wrong way to merchandise. Great displays are the result of thorough planning, and you'll need to keep records to learn what works with your clientele. Take pictures of every display and keep track of the product sales realized from each. By documenting sales, you will learn which presentations to recycle and which not to repeat.

Merchandising is the foundation of retail sales. It should be an integral part of your build-out, marketing plan and budget. If you don't update your retail area regularly, clients may assume you have nothing new to offer. By simply rotating merchandise, changing displays, shifting signage and featuring new products, you create the perception that your medical aesthetic business is on the cutting edge of technology and trends.

A clearly defined pathway to the retail area is the next key to success. Studies show that most people will veer to the right when first entering any retail space. This behavior is known as the "invariant right" and occurs simply because most clients are right-handed. Take this into consideration when planning traffic flow in your facility. Setting up a product display to the right of the transition zone will allow you to maximize your merchandising opportunities.

Investing in multifunctional fixtures is another key to successful merchandising. By using high quality wall-mounted and freestanding floor displays, you can effectively change your retail space seasonally.

Whatever fixtures you use, proper lighting is essential to savvy merchandising and is often underutilized in medspas. You want to choose lighting that can be adjusted easily to highlight different displays. Track lighting is a simple and easy solution that lets you enhance specific areas of the retail space and draw attention to the merchandise you wish to spotlight.



Attractive displays and vibrant signage draw shoppers in at The Skin Center in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Merchandising begins with spatial arrangements. When a patient enters your medspa, the initial few feet of space are considered the transition zone. This area should fill a client's senses with appropriate music, a balanced view of the retail area and a pleasant scent, setting the stage for her overall experience. The basic idea is to make your product offerings extremely visible while keeping the environment peaceful and appropriate. Even before a patient speaks with a staff member, she forms perceptions and makes judgments. Her first impressions can alter her mood and make her more or less receptive to everything she encounters during her visit.

### Engaging Senses

Great retail areas are designed around the senses. Retail products sold in medspas will primarily engage the senses of touch, sound, smell and sight. Studies show that skincare products sell better when patients can pick them up, smell them and try them. To effectively merchandise around the sense of touch and smell, you will need to consider sample trays with multiple products appropriately grouped together. You can group similar products, such as a variety of masks, or feature an entire treatment regimen like a cleanser, toner, serum and moisturizer. Be mindful of product scents and group complementary



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aromas together. Ancillary products such as candles and reed diffusers create an additional opportunity to fill your retail space with pleasant scents and additional products to sell.

Placing multiple sample trays in one area is effective on many levels. Patients will be more likely to try more than one type of product. Staff members can more easily demonstrate products, answer questions and keep the displays tidy and stocked with the spatulas and tissues you will need to prevent any cross-contamination. Include samples of as many products as possible, while taking care not to overwhelm patients with clutter.

When deciding what sounds will fill the retail area, it is best to choose music that is set at a tempo to relax clients and slow their sense of time. Selecting music that is wordless is wise, for it allows clients to focus on browsing and making selections. Many top spas play only music that they sell in the retail area.

The element of sight is the final sense that ties all others together into a cohesive and effective merchandising area. Ensuring that the space appears appealing and organized is sometimes challenging for business owners new to merchandising. Choose an overall plan for the space—a specific theme or a unifying purpose—and stick to it. One safe direction for beginners is a monochromatic theme. Grouping products by package color can create a clean, uncluttered feel. Accent the groupings with architecturally pleasing art pieces and mix in shelf-talkers that give details about each product.

Color is an important merchandising element; it can change a person's mood and has the ability to influence decisions. It can convey a festive holiday mood or a dramatic change of seasons. Choose a few colors your target market can identify with and add complementary splashes of color to that basic palette.

### Selective Placement

We all know the importance of location to business success. That same theory applies when placing products in your retail



Above: Sampling stations like this one allow patients to smell and feel products you recommend.

Below: A spotlight effectively draws attention to this makeup display.



space. Product placement can be the difference between rapid sales and products that grow old on your shelves. Here are six basics of proper product placement:

**1. Have a major focal point for every display.** The easiest way to produce a focal point is to place the featured product directly in the line of vision and then surround it with complementary products. The products on the periphery will not only frame the featured product but create a natural opportunity for up-sells.

**2. Be conscious of the average height of your patients.** If you are shorter or taller than your average client, be sure to create the focal point at the client's average height, not yours. This may sound silly, but it can make a dramatic difference in sales.

**3. Strive for balance.** Asymmetrical displays can be stunning, as long as the balance and perspective are appropriate. The goal should always be to create a sense of organization and harmony. "Many merchandising mavens draw a design plan before beginning to move products around," states Coty Long, Durocher Enterprises' visual merchandising guru with 20 years of experience. "Before beginning to shift things around, think about whether you want to organize product from front to back, right to left, in a curved pattern or a triangular shape." Taking the time to map out a plan for product placement will save time in the long run and will make it easier for additional staff members to help with the process.

**4. Give new products prime placement.** Introduce new products with shelf-talkers that explain the product's unique selling points. If your patients are price conscious, you can increase sales by creating an attractive price-point display.



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**5. Change the focus.** Prime placement should not always go to a new product. It is equally important to keep best-sellers and top moneymakers front and center. Knowing which products are your top five retail drivers and keeping them in a prime location makes good merchandising sense.

**6. Take advantage of high traffic areas.** While it is important to keep the reception/checkout areas clear of clutter, there are many ways to create opportunities for "impulse" buys. Small products such as lip plumpers or travel-size sunscreens can be tempting add-on purchases. If you pay attention to merchandising, the little sales will add up to a big number by the end of the year. Understanding the reasoning behind every single product placement will help you increase sales.

### Suggestive Selling

While often overlooked, suggestive selling—having your staff mention specific products to patients in a low-key way—is one aspect of merchandising that can make a tremendous difference in medspa retail sales. This technique is great for seasonal specials and time-sensitive products. A good way to assist your staff with suggestive selling is through the creation of simple scripts. Choose two to three products that you wish to feature during a defined period and script their key features and unique selling points. If you find the scripting process challenging, ask product suppliers

to help. When the scripts are complete, ask staff members to get comfortable with the language and then require them to mention at least one product to every patient they serve. The "every client gets one mention" is a great way to boost sales of a new product, turn a seasonal item before it becomes dated or move overstocked products off the shelves.

Suggestive selling can also take other forms. Studies show that close to 40% of customers will say yes when asked by a staff member if they wish to upgrade in size or quantity. One of the best times to suggest up-sells is when you are check-

ing patients out and scheduling future appointments.

Celebrity endorsements are another form of suggestive selling. Like it or not, beauty product sales are celebrity driven. Many clients will be more likely to purchase a product used by their favorite musician, actor or performer. Ask your product representative for any and all product endorsements and introduce one when you need to do a mid-month merchandising touch-up. Create visual aids that can assist with sales in the form of photos of the celebrity and what the person said.

Have staff members master the art of cross-merchandising, a technique routinely used by top retailers. Cross-merchandising is simply suggesting products that complement each other. Displays using this tactic present a wonderful opportunity to introduce clients to services they haven't yet tried. Just like its counterpart cross-marketing, cross-merchandising creates opportunities to increase sales while creating loyalty to your medspa. It is highly effective and is the suggestive selling technique that can offer a

significant reward to your business when applied consistently.

As long as you keep looking for creative and innovative ways to use your retail space, you will guarantee continued growth in retail sales. Merchandising thrives on creativity. Ask your team to help—a fresh pair of eyes can bring new ideas and inspiration. The right merchandising can be the difference between products flying out the door

or moldering on the shelf. And in addition to the added revenue, a comfortable, well-appointed, properly stocked retail area gives patients another reason to return to you. If you implement only a few of the ideas presented above, you will most likely have a leg up on the competition. ■



*Jillian Fraser is a certified corporate trainer and consultant for Durocher Enterprises ([durocherenterprises.com](http://durocherenterprises.com)) specializing in the management and development of plastic surgery centers and medspas. She can be reached at [jillian@durocherenterprises.com](mailto:jillian@durocherenterprises.com).*